DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 144 404 FL 008 910

AUTHOR Chambers, Janice S.; And Others
TITLE Interference of a Native Dialect in Second Dialect Acquisition. Occasional Papers on Linguistics, No. 1.
INSTITUTION Southern Illinois Univ., Carbondale. Dept. of Linguistics.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 7p.; Proceedings of the International Conference on Frontiers in Language Proficiency and Dominance Testing (1st, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, April 21-23, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American English; *Black Dialects; Blacks; Black Students; *Dialect Studies; Grammar; *Interference (Language Learning); Language Research; *Language Variation; Linguistic Competence; Linguistic Theory; Native Speakers; *Nonstandard Dialects; Phonology; *Second Language Learning; Semantics; Sociolinguistics; Standard Spoken Usage; Surface Structure

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of interference of a native dialect in the acquisition of a second dialect. Four groups of subjects were used: Five white preschool children from an intergrated nursery school, five Black preschool children from a Head Start program, five white, middle-class 16-, 17-, and 18-year-olds, and five Black 16-, 17-, and 18-year-olds from the University of Cincinnati's Upward Bound program. Subjects listened to a tape of twenty sentences, ten in Black dialect and ten in Standard English, and were asked to repeat what they heard. The changes or errors were evaluated according to the nine factors listed by Baratz (1969). The study found that: (1) native speakers can reproduce their own dialect better than non-native speakers; (2) each group experienced a significant amount of interference from their native dialect in an attempt to speak the second dialect; (3) both groups at the same age level made approximately the same number of changes with their native and second dialects; and (4) neither Black nor white children are usually bi-dialectal, but competency increases with age.
(Author/AM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Interference of a Native Dialect In Second Dialect Acquisition

Janice S. Chambers, Faye Nell Vowell and John W. Chambers, Jr.
University of Cincinnati

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Occasional Papers on Linguistics
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

ED144404

In this study we investigated the effects of interference of a native dialect in the acquisition of a second dialect. Four groups of subjects were used: Five white preschool children from an intergrated nursery school, five Black preschool children from a Head Start program, five white middle class 16, 17, 18 year old children, and five Black 16, 17, 18 year old children from the University of Cincinnati's Upward Bound program. Each subject listened to a tape of twenty sentences, ten in Black dialect and ten in Standard English and was asked to repeat what he heard. The changes or errors were evaluated according to the nine factors listed by Baratz (1969). We found that native speakers can reproduce their own dialect better than non-native speakers. Each group experienced a significant amount of interference from their native dialect in an attempt to speak the second dialect. Both groups at the same age level made approximately the same number of changes with their native and second dialects. Neither Black nor white children are usually bi-dialectal but competency increases with age.

Recently, there has been great upsurge in the amount of national concern paid to the educational achievements of minority students. As the largest minority the Black American has attracted the most attention. With the acceptance of Black English as a systematic dialect, not merely a substandard form of English, researchers have begun to grapple with the pedagogical problems: what is the most effective way to teach Standard English, what particular problems exist and what specific actions can a teacher undertake to implement the process. One problem that is readily apparent is that of interference--the native dialect of the speaker interfers with his internalization of a second dialect. Significant dialect interference may occur because of the grammatical and phonological divergence of Black English and Standard English. Interference causes difficulty for Black students in both speaking, reading and writing. As a result of this, the child may encounter some difficulty achieving educationally in schools which are linquistically based on Standard English. These type of problems result from the natural tendency of a speaker to carry over the habits of his native language into the second, or to translate directly from one into the other. Where distinctions exist in the second language which are not found in the native language, these will often not be recognized and will lead to mistakes in grammar or meaning (Saville & Troike,

FL008910

1970).

A repetition task can be used as a test for the degree of interference in an individual's perception of a second language and could be used as indication of problems for the student. Yet it also possesses the positive aspect of predicting the student's competence. The underlying assumption involved in administering a sentence repetition test is it assesses not simply auditory memory span but some sort of basic linquistic competence (Baratz, 1971). It is presumed that sentence repetition is not merely imitation but rather re-generation of sentence meaning.

The 1969 experiment by Joan C. Baratz is a pioneer study of interference. Subjects were third and fifth grade students from two Washington, D.C. schools. Fifteen Black students from each grade level were selected from an inner city school, and fifteen white students from each grade were chosen from an intergrated, low-middle income area school for a total of sixty subjects. Every subject listened to a tape containing fifteen Standard English sentences and fifteen Black English sentences and repeated what he heard. Each group of speakers did significantly better in responding to sentences in their native dialect than did the other group. Further Baratz drew three conclusions from her study: Black children are confronted with two dialects in an educational situation. Black children are not usually bidialectal and there is definite interference from their native language in an attempt to speak Standard English.

Brown (1975) has reported that the ability to discriminate between Black Non-standard English (BNSE) and Black Standard English (BSE) as a difficult task below second grade and may be impossible at the kindergarten level. Brown (1975) has also reported the ability to discriminate between Black Non-standard English and Black Standard English and with it the dominance of Black Standard English over Black Non-standard English, which evidently increases with age and/or exposure to school.

William Labov (1969) has explained the ability to translate a sentence in a second dialect into the native dialect as an indication that the speaker has grasped the meaning of the sentence although surface form has been passed by. Therefore, to gain competence in Standard English, a Black Dialect speaker need only exploit knowledge he already possesses by giving explicit attention to surface forms.

In somewhat the same vein, Rudolph C. Troike (1972) explains the repetitions which differ from the model as evidence of the receptive competence of the speaker, who first decodes the model to understand its meaning, then re-encodes it into his native dialect. It is believed that oral-repetition testing provides both a rapid diagnostic instrument for determining native dialect characteristics and an excellent device for evaluating receptive knowledge of the second dialect. The repetition test is also useful in discovering what grammatical and lexical items are not a part of a speaker's receptive competence because he will not be able to repeat

them in either dialect; he is only able to produce incoherent fragments. These items can subsequently be introduced into his receptive competence and with adequate practice be incorporated into his productive competence. Thus interference is an important factor for Black children in the learning of Standard English.

The purpose of our experiment was two-fold: to test the validity of the results of the Baratz study and further to investigate the influence of an age factor on the results. Accordingly, we worked with four groups of subjects: five white preschoolers from an integrated nursery school in Clifton, five Black pre-schoolers from a Head Start Program, five white 16, 17 and 18 year olds from Western Hills High School, a middle class white neighborhood, and five Black 16, 17 and 18 year olds from the University of Cincinnati's Upward Bound Program. Each subject listened to a tape of twenty sentences, ten in Standard English and ten in Black Dialect, and they were asked to repeat the sentences presented.

We were evaluating changes or "errors" in sentences which were in non-native dialect on the basis of nine factors:

1)pluralization
2)possessive marker
3)copula
4)past tense marker
5)usage of "be"
6)3rd person singular-noun/verb agreement
7)noun/verb agreement
8)done replacing have
9)phonological changes--loss of final and initial consonants: t, d, l, and change th to d.

The data were analyzed according to the presence or absence of the above constructions within the appropriate sentences presented. First a median split was performed on the production of Black Non-standard American English sentences for all four age groups. The median number of errors for each group are indicated in Table 1. They consist of fourteen changes (errors) for the Western Hills students producing Black Nonstandard English sentences, eighteen changes (errors) for the white pre-schoolers using Black Nonstandard dialect sentences, six changes (errors) in the production of Black Nonstandard entences by Upward Bound Students, and fourteen changes (errors) for the Head Start pre-schoolers.

The median scores for the production of Standard American English were as follows: one change among the Western Hills High School students, eight changes by the white preschoolers, seven changes by the Upward Bound students and eighteen changes by the Head Start pre-schoolers. Figure 1 contains two graphs, one on the performance of each group on the Black English sentences and the other on the performance of each group on the Standard English sentences.

The mean score for the number of changes made in the

imitation of Black Dialect by the white students from Western Hills and the middle class pre-school was 15.8. On the same task, the Upward Bound and the Head Start pre-schoolers' scores were combined to yeild a mean of 10, indicating an average of 10 changes of the Black Dialect sentence patterns presented. In looking at the mean score for both groups of Black students, Upward Bound and Head Start, who imitated Standard English, 13.5 changes were noted. On the other hand, the white students from Western Hills High School and the middle class pre-school scored a mean of 4.0, indicating an average of less change in imitating Standard English sentences than their Black counterpart.

Observation of the total white performance versus the total Black performance on the production of both Black Dialect sentences and Standard English sentences reveals a Chi Square value of 5.16 which indicates a significant difference at .95 level of confidence between the performance of these two groups. That is, the white students performed significantly better than the Black groups in imitating Standard English sentences while the reverse was true for imitating Black Dialect sentences.

Further observation of white versus Black performance on Black Dialect sentences using a Chi Square analysis indicated there were no significant differences between the number of changes made from one dialect to the opposite dialect by either group. Again, the Chi Square analysis was used to determine the amount of change occuring between the white group versus the Black group in the production of Standard English sentences produced a value that indicated no differences in the amount of change in imitating Standard American English. That is, the white subjects tended to change the Black Dialect sentences into Standard English to the same degree the Black subjects tended to change Standard English into Black Dialect.

Our results concur with those of Baratz (1969) and Brown (1975). That is, both groups of children could not discriminate between their native dialect and the second dialect in the repetition task. These children demonstrated that they could comprehend the second dialect by the fact that equivalent meaning was maintained between the input sentences and the reproductions in the repetition task. The interference only occured when the children attempted to reproduce the second dialect. All of these changes only represent surface structure types of interference, not a change in meaning. Children at this age probabilly do not have the necessary linguistic concepts that are basic for this task. Before entering school, children have not been exposed to the differences between "school talk" and "home talk" and such differences have not been communicated to children of this age.

Early adolescents is believed to be the time when children become more aware of the social significance of dialect characteristics. This, along with exposure to the second dialect influences the awareness and ability to reproduce the interfering dialect. Knowledge and sensitivity

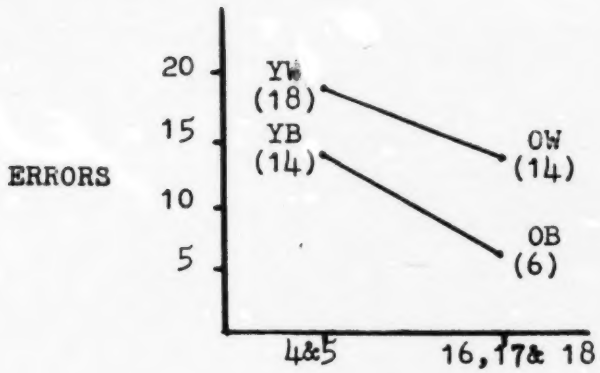
of the second dialect reduces interference.

Our conclusions can be summarized as follows. Native speakers can reproduce their own dialect better than non-native speakers. Each group experienced dignificant interference from their native dialect in an attempt to speak the second dialect. Both groups made approximately the same number of changes, but in differenct directions. Neither Black children nor white children are usually bi-dialectal but competency increases with age.

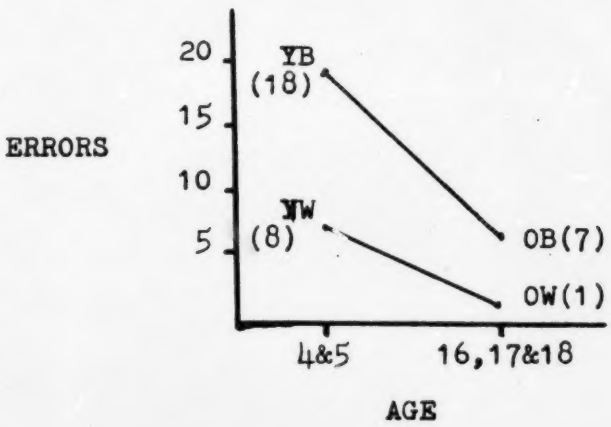
TABLE 1- MEDIAN ERRORS

BLACK DIALECT	
Western Hills-white-16-18 years	14 ERRORS
Upper Middle Class Preschool-white	18 ERRORS
Upward Bound-Black-16-18 years	6 ERRORS
Head Start Preschool-Black	14 ERRORS
STANDARD ENGLISH	
Western Hills-white-16-18 years	1 ERROR
Upper Middle Class Preschool-white	8 ERRPRS
Upward Bound-Black- 16-18 years	7 ERRORS
Head Start Preschool-Black	18 ERRORS

BLACK ENGLISH



STANDARD ENGLISH



YW-YOUNG WHITE
OW-OLD WHITE
YB-YOUNG BLACK
OB-OLD BLACK

FIGURE 1. The performance of each group on the Black English sentences and the Standard English sentences.